

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY
PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the PDG held on-line via Zoom software
from 10.00 on Friday 22 April 2022

Present: Steve Williams, West Somerset Railway Plc (Chair)
Mike Thompson, West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust
Mike Sherwood, West Somerset Railway Association
John Parsons, Station Masters Representative
Martin Adfield, Staff Representative
Martin Howard, DEPG

In attendance: Mel Hillman, PDG Administrator

Apologies: were received from:

Cllr David Hall, Somerset County Council
Cllr Mike Rigby, Somerset West & Taunton Council
(NB – attendance by the councillors was restricted due to the forthcoming
Council elections on 5 May 2022)
Richard Newton, Friends Groups Representative

Minute

**Action
by**

1. Introduction

Steve Williams welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was confirmed that an invitation had been sent to the Somerset & Dorset Trust and would continue for future meetings.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 were AGREED.

3. Matters Arising (not on the agenda)

- i) **Minute 3(iv)Volunteer Recruitment:** Steve Williams confirmed that the interim arrangement involving Rod Greenway had ceased and the process taken back under the Plc through the HR function. An advert had been placed for a Volunteer Co-ordinator to work with HR and there had been some interest expressed.
- ii) **Minute 5 Energy Audit:** Martin Adfield reported that David Carter had had to withdraw. Martin had completed about 90% of the Audit and some initial views had been submitted to the Plc General Manager. He was intending to finalise matters in the next couple of weeks.
- iii) **Minute 6 Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link:** Steve Williams confirmed that there would be no train link for this season. All sides had been keen to resume services but a lack of units and drivers had prevented this. The matter would remain under discussion for the next year.

MA

- iv) **Minute 9 Williton Site Update:** Martin Howard reported that a roof inspection of the old goods shed had been completed and it had been decided to raise the fencing on the gutters to double height and provide wrap round covers for the corners. Once this had been completed, the scaffolding could be removed.
- v) **Minute 10(ii) WSR TV:** Martin Adfield reported that there would be a further meeting in the next week to proceed matters. One consideration would be the re-issuing of a previous WSRA TV clip (lasting about one hour) which focussed on volunteers on the railway. It remained relevant to current circumstances.
- vi) **Minute 11 PEG Update:** Steve Williams reported that the Group was seeking a volunteer Environmental Advisor. There had been much discussion on where to focus the advert and approaches had been made to universities and colleges to see if there were any academic personnel interested. Anyone interested in the role should contact Steve Williams.

ALL

4. Joint Fund-Raising Group

Steve Williams reported that matters had been over-taken after an internal Plc discussion. Emails had gone out to assess the level of interest in the Group. There had been some interest as there were specific needs for some groups. There had been no response from others. The question was asked – was there support for this Group or not?

Mike Sherwood reported that he had had a meeting with the Plc Chairman and General Manager recently where this had been discussed. There had been agreement that the General Managers of the Plc and WSRA needed to work together on this, forming a vital relationship. Mike had concerns about an overall fund-raising group which could be telling others how to fund-raise. There was an effective flow of information and requests at present. He added that the WSRA now had a station fund available for requests. There were concerns about the objective of the new Group. Steve Williams replied that there was a much wider remit intended so that projects could be prioritised for the allocation of funds raised. Mike Sherwood added that this would be acceptable if real needs were identified and prioritised but not a long list of 'it would be nice' suggestions. Steve Williams replied that it should be possible to do both but no more than one or two could be adopted each year. If there was no support or discussion for fund-raising there would be no consideration of the wider issues. A way would need to be found through the current arrangements.

Mike Sherwood commented that the WSRA would focus on the core things that the Plc deemed essential. The key would be the defined list of priorities that came forward. There shouldn't be more local initiatives. Steve Williams replied that if there was no support for focussing on priorities, the meeting should move on. Martin Adfield asked how the WSR ensured that it was tapping into the maximum available funds from all sources. Steve Williams replied that this was the rationale for the Group. Mike Sherwood replied

that the WSRA had engaged a professional fund-raiser and added that charities had access to a wider range of funding agencies than the Plc. The WSRA was raising funding to help the Plc – such as rail renewal – and had provided around £200,000 over the past 5 years or so.

Steve Williams summed up that, arrangements were already in place to identify essential projects and the costs were known. This formed the basis of a clear set of priorities.

5. Williton Strategic Engineering Review Group

Steve Williams confirmed that work had started but had not progressed as the future of Shering's Yard had been awaited. This had been agreed earlier in the week. The details remained commercial in confidence but Steve did confirm that a new lease may be considered in 2023 with a cash offer for future use. There were further negotiations to be completed but there had been a willingness to allow railway access and control beyond 2023. In answer to a question, Steve confirmed that the lease option would be at least 10 years.

There were three other factors:

- i) The DEPG had submitted some different ideas to those first considered and this would be discussed at Plc Board in the next week for further discussions with DEPG.
- ii) The Plc had decided that the time was now convenient to develop its 3-to-5-year Business Plan for the Williton site. This would align with the Williton Review.
- iii) The Steam Heritage Trust had also identified its own requirements and changes to the agreed usage of the site which required more discussion.

Steve Williams would reconvene the Group when appropriate.

SW

6. Developments for Platform 1 at Bishops Lydeard

Mike Thompson reported on some developments at Bishops Lydeard station.

He had been targeting repairs to the roof of Station House. There had been delays with the contractor but it was intended this would be completed in the second week of May 2022.

There had been a meeting on the previous day with a consultancy to discuss some creative options for Platform 1 to increase visitors participation. These included plans for extending the Gauge Museum. These were a challenge to develop additional space without distracting from the heritage feel of the Museum and station.

A site visit was planned in the next week to Taffs Wells station in South Wales where a footbridge was available for free but with

transport and re-erection costs. One option would be to use this at Bishops Lydeard to improve access to Platform 1 but there would be much to consider including the heritage impact and lines of sight for signals. It was intended to develop Bishops Lydeard station as an attraction in its own right. The proposals were potentially exciting.

7. DEPG Proposals

Martin Howard had already mentioned the removal of the scaffolding around the old Goods Shed earlier in the meeting.

He added that the DEPG were looking to take forward plans to define exactly what the project would look like. One major factor would be that they were dealing with a listed building. The Group did have a retired building inspector as a volunteer who had provided considerable support and input into the plans. There had been a meeting with the local council officer for listed building and this had been restricted due to the costs of such advice. However, the Group had been put in touch with the Somerset Building Preservation Trust which offered free help and advice on listed buildings. There would be an onsite meeting with the Trust on 17 May 2022 to consider what may be possible. Mike Sherwood commented that the WSRA might be able to help fund the costs of the local council officer work.

8. Covered Accommodation

Steve Williams reported that a meeting of the Review Group was due in the next week and papers would be going out shortly.

Steve added that he wished to bring this item to an end soon to deal with the covered storage needs of operational and heritage rolling stock.

Three site options were open for consideration – Station Farm at Bishops Lydeard, Norton Fitzwarren and a new site somewhere along the line. The stock was deteriorating adding to costs. An outcome should be known in a couple of weeks.

SW

9. Washford

Work had begun to bring the station back into active use. A Stationmaster had been appointed and a team of volunteers were working on this project. Mike Sherwood indicated that the WSRA would support the team including help with signage.

The current position regarding Washford Yard was noted. Steve Williams, on behalf of the Plc would be having further discussions with the WSR Family organisations.

10. Blue Anchor Station Museum

Mike Thompson reported that the Steam Heritage Trust had decided to keep the Museum closed for the current season and to re-evaluate its usage. There had been some areas of damp and

exhibit deterioration. Some valuable items had been removed for safe storage.

11. Bishops Lydeard to Taunton Partnership Group

Steve Williams reminded members that a bid for funding for this had been unsuccessful. However, discussions had been held with Network Rail and GWR to identify other funding streams. Progress was being made on reconnecting scheduled trains. This would not be a quick nor easy project but connectivity to the mainline was seen as essential to the long-term viability of the WSR. Steve would keep members updated. This would be a major step forward and Phase 1 would be infrastructure 'light' with little work required due to existing provision. Questions were asked about a speed limit over the section. Options would be discussed. Steve added that there had been some WSR 'red lines' in the discussions. These had included continued access to the Norton Triangle and retaining full control of activities at Bishops Lydeard to retain a heritage focus. In answer to further questions Steve confirmed that the track would remain single track in Phase 1. Money and politics would determine the future. Discussions on the car park at Bishops Lydeard were still ongoing.

SW

Steve would keep members updated.

12. AOB

- i) **DEPG:** Martin Howard reported that new springs had been fitted to 7017 so two vehicles were now available for use.
- ii) There were no issues raised by other groups.
- iii) Steve Williams raised four other issues:
 - a) **Representation on the Safety Committee:** Steve Williams reported that volunteers to serve on the Safety Committee were sought. Details had been uploaded to HOPS and anyone interested should respond to that.
 - b) **Heritage Committee:** Ian Colby had agreed to take forward the reconvening of the Heritage Committee and an advert had also been uploaded to HOPS. Nominations were being sought for volunteers from all Groups. Mike Sherwood felt that the Plc and WSRA should be sitting members of this Committee due to the fund-raising implications eg cost of bullhead rail against flatbottom rail. Steve Williams commented that the WSRA could nominate a representative for the Committee where priorities would be discussed.
 - c) **New Technology Demonstration – 7 April:** Steve Williams commented on the extremely successful demonstration of new technology which had attracted around 50 visitors to the railway. There had been follow up requests for further such days and showed the WSR to be

widening its horizons to generate better resources to reinvest into the railway.

- d) **Plc Corporate Plan:** Subject to Plc agreement there would be a need to develop the Corporate Plan for the next 5 years. This had been placed on hold until longer term sustainability became clearer. Steve Williams would be leading a formal consultation process.

ALL

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be arranged in late September 2022. Mel Hillman would circulate members for availability in due course.

MHi

The meeting closed at 11.05am